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McNAMARA: His Ordeal in the Pentagon, By Henry L. Trewhitt. Harper & Row. 307 pp. \$7.95

By Ronald Steel

The most telling comment about Robert McNamara is to be found not in Henry Trewhitt's informative, workmanlike account of "his ordeal in the Pentagon," but in the no-longer-secret Vietnam papers. There we learn that while Lyndon Johnson was denouncing the wider war he was preparing to fight, and while Taylor, Rostow, McNaughton, and the two Bundys were drawing up plans for the devastation of North Vietnam and the dispatch of an American army, the former secretary of defense was less interested in the debate over the clandestine build-up than in making sure the supply trains would run on time. "From the records," the Pentagon report states, "the Secretary comes out much more clearly for good management than he does for any particular strategy."

This confirms what we long suspected about the man who in his seven years in office doubled the military budget to \$80 billion; streamlined the war machine, multiplied the missile force, and obsessively persisted in the TFX fiasco; and whose proudest accomplishment was to increase our ability to fight non-nuclear warsan achievement that made Vietnam possible. Applying his managerial experience at Ford to the military and political labyrinths of the Pentagon, McNamara was a ruthless, often brilliant, administrator. But his political judgment was narrow, his preoccupation with efficiency all-consuming, and his humane instincts at war with his loyalty to authority and his faith in technology. A superb technician, he carried out orders, never questioned the wider purposes of the war he engineered with such chilling efficiency, and meekly shuffled off stage when he was no longer wanted.

The McNamara story is not tragic, for that implies a higher form of self-recognition absent from this tale. Nor is it even pathetic. Rather it is a now almost-classic account of intelligence in the service of power, and organizational efficiency as an end in itself. To reflect on the career of Robert McNamara is to understand how. German intellectuals such as Albert Speer could have served the Nazi war machine. The kind of mind that asks how rather than why will always be honored so long as it performs the functions assigned to it. The fact that McNamara was able to rationalize his role as engineer of the Victnam war until late 1967, when fatigue and disillusion made the effort almost insupportable, is what gives his case a special meaning.

A good part of this comes through in Trewhitt's Mc-Namara, a useful account of a man whose most interesting feature was his capacity for self-deception. Diplomatic correspondent of Newsweck, and editor of

under the title The Essence of Security, Trowhitt man- pen + agen ages to be objective despite his evident sympathy for his subject. Although he skillfully recounts McNamara's rise to the presidency of the Ford Motor Company and czar of the world's most powerful military machine, Merry L. Spither his sympathy nor his proximity to the subject is sufficient to bring to life an inscrutable figure who on the same day could quote T. S. Eliot and choose bombing targets in Vietname. In the end we are left to interpret South Or (Dece as we will the "conflict between the supremely rational technocrat and the humanist who quoted philosophers and poets...a creature of towering accomplishment and substantial failure."

The accomplishments are real, though some are temporal, and others of dubious desirability. He asserted the authority of his computer-wielding civilians over the military; resisted numerous pork-barrel projects foisted on him by military contractors, gadget-happy generals, and brass-minded congressmen; helped push through the Senate the nuclear test-ban treaty of 1963; and transformed a military force based on deterrence through nuclear weapons into a powerful instrument of aggressive diplomacy capable of intervening anywhere in the world at any chosen level of violence.

Within a month after assuming office he wrote off, to Kennedy's embarrassment, the so-called "missile gap" as a figment of Democratic politicians' imagination; undertook a complete review of U.S. strategy, and evolved a policy of "flexible response" ranging from nuclear devastation to counter-guerrilla warfare. Adopting Maxwell Taylor's argument for more powerful non-nuclear forces, he wanted an army capable of fighting limited wars without triggering an atomic holocaust. Like Kennedy, lie believed guerrilla wars were the wave of the future, and held in contempt attitudes such as those expressed by Charles Wilson, one of his predecessors under Eisenhower, who believed, "We can't afford to fight limited wars. We can only afford to fight a big war, and if there is one, that is the kind it will be."

McNamara's job was to make sure that we could fight any kind of war. Once the capacity was there, once he had swollen the military budget and pushed his programs through a Congress intimidated by manipulated crises such as those in Berlin and Cuba, the war was found-in Vietnam. The liberal intellectuals Kennedy brought with him to Washington staked out the terrain, and McNamara provided the precision war machine which allowed them to test their theories of "compellence," "counter-insurgency," and "nation-building." Eventually the cuphoria wore off, the failure of Vietnam became increasingly obvious, and many began to question the need for such multi-Lillion-dollar gadgets as the scandal-ridden C-5A transport plane and the oceangoing FDL troop carriers. Even such a conservative as Richard Russell, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, began complaining that "if it is easy for us to go anywhere and do anything, we will always be going somewhere and doing something."

But that was near the end, when McNamara's theories of "flexible response" seemed a formula for unending war rather than a device to avoid the choice between embarrassment or atomic holocaust. In the beginning,

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